

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4100
INFO ALL EC CAPITALS
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY LISBON
USMISSION USNATO
DIA WASHDC
AMCONSUL BORDEAUX
AMCONSUL LYON
AMCONSUL MARSEILLE
AMCONSUL NICE
AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 20807

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, FR
SUBJECT: FRANCOIS MITTERRAND AND THE FUTURE OF FRENCH
SOCIALISM

SUMMARY. A MAN ON THE DEFENSIVE OR A CRAFTY POLITICIAN
CONSERVING HIS POWER UNTIL THE MOMENT IS RIPE? FRAN-
COIS MITTERRAND SHOWED SIGNS OF BOTH AT THE JUNE 27
LUNCHEON WITH THE AMBASSADOR AT THE EMBASSY RESIDENCE,
VIGOROUSLY (AND SOMETIMES EXCESSIVELY) DEFENDING THE
HEALTH OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY (PS) BUT QUITE OBVIOUSLY
CONFIDENT OF HIS OWN ABILITY TO CONTROL THE PARTY'S
DESTINY. LOW-KEY THROUGHOUT, THE SOCIALIST LEADER HARDLY
RESEMBLED THE LOQUACIOUS, DYNAMIC CAMPAIGNER OF SEVERAL
MONTHS AGO. CLEARLY DISAPPOINTED WITH THE RESULTS OF THE
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MARCH ELECTIONS, WHERE HE FEELS A CERTAIN LEFT VICTORY
WAS SQUANDERED BY THE COMMUNISTS, HE NONETHELESS RETAINS
A DOGGED BELIEF IN THE INEVITABILITY OF SOCIALIST SUC-
CESS. CHARACTERIZING THE PS' ROLE IN FRENCH SOCIETY AS
"CRUCIAL" IN PREVENTING AN EVENTUAL SOCIAL "EXPLOSION",
MITTERRAND EMBODIED THE NEW SOCIALIST STRATEGY OF TOTAL
AUTONOMY, BOTH TO THE LEFT AND RIGHT:

-- THE FUTURE OF THE PCF? UNLIKELY TO CHANGE
SUBSTANTIALLY IN THE SHORT TERM, BUT IN ANY
CASE THE NEXT THREE YEARS CALL FOR COMPETITION
RATHER THAN COOPERATION;
-- PROBLEMS IN THE MAJORITY? NATURALLY THE PS
WILL EXPLOIT THEM WHENEVER POSSIBLE, BUT IT'S
NOT WORTH SPECULATING ABOUT -- "IT'S THEIR
PROBLEM."

BETRAYED BY THE COMMUNISTS, UNWILLING AND INDEED UNABLE
TO MOVE TOWARD THE CENTER, FRANCOIS MITTERRAND SEEMS
DETERMINED TO CHART A PURELY SOCIALIST COURSE WHICH
MUST TRUST IN THE FUTURE AND IN CHANGING POLITICAL WINDS
TO BRING THE OPERATION TO A HAPPY ENDING. MITTERRAND
DISCUSSED FRANCE'S ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN A
PURELY NATIONAL CONTEXT, AS IF THERE WERE NO CONSTRAINTS
DERIVING FROM FRANCE'S ECONOMIC POSITION WITHIN EUROPE
OR IN THE WORLD; HE DID NOT TALK LIKE EITHER A EUROPEAN
OR AN INTERNATIONALIST. NOR WAS HE WARM IN HIS COMMENTS
ABOUT THE UNITED STATES. END SUMMARY.

1. MITTERRAND'S COMING TO LUNCH WAS PART OF THE AMBAS-
SADOR'S PROGRAM, INITIATED LAST FALL TO INVITE FRANCE'S
MAJOR POLITICAL LEADERS. FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS IT
HAD BEEN IMPOSSIBLE TO FIND A MUTUALLY AGREEABLE DATE
WITH MITTERRAND UNTIL NOW.

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2. HISTORY WEIGHS HEAVILY ON FRANCOIS MITTERRAND.
ALTHOUGH ALREADY A LEGEND ON THE POLITICAL SCENE, HE HAS
NONETHELESS BEEN DENIED THE FINAL VICTORY WHICH WOULD
HAVE CAPPED HIS CAREER. NEVER WERE HIS HOPES HIGHER
THAN IN MARCH 1978; NEVER WAS HIS DISAPPOINTMENT SO PRO-
FOUND. THE MANNER OF THE MAN HAS CONSEQUENTLY CHANGED,
THE FERVOR AND DYNAMISM OF THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN REPLA-
CED BY A STILL RELUCTANT RESIGNATION TO THE PROSPECT OF
A DIFFICULT AND UNCERTAIN POLITICAL FUTURE. AS IF HE
STILL DOES NOT BELIEVE THAT THE LEFT REALLY LOST, MITTER-
RAND TALKS OF THE "REAL" LEFT MAJORITY WHICH EXISTS IN
THE COUNTRY, OF THE MORE THAN 50 PERCENT OF THE POPULA-
TION WHO VOTED AGAINST THE GOVERNING COALITION.

3. YET THERE IS A STRONG SENSE OF REALISM IN MITTER-
RAND'S THINKING, A RECOGNITION THAT THE ROAD TO SOCIA-
LISM WILL BE DIFFICULT AND TEDIOUS. THERE ARE NO LONGER
THE CATCH-PHRASES OF THE COMMON PROGRAM AND THE UNION OF
THE LEFT TO EXPLAIN THE IMMEDIATE ROUTE TO POWER.
MITTERRAND NOW TALKS IN MORE HISTORICAL, LONGER RANGE
TERMS, E.G., FAVORABLY COMPARING PS PROGRESS OF THE LAST
SEVEN YEARS WITH THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF LEON BLUM OVER 15

YEARS. HE BELIEVES THERE IS NO LONGER A CREDIBLE SHORT-TERM STRATEGY FOR THE SOCIALISTS; THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE, SHORT OF THE COMPROMISE WITH THE CENTER WHICH WOULD

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PROBABLY DESTROY THE PARTY, IS PS AUTONOMY WHICH ALLOWS THE ORGANIZATION TO SURVIVE AND CONSOLIDATE ITSELF WHILE AWAITING MORE FAVORABLE HISTORICAL CIRCUMSTANCES.

4. THAT IS NOT TO SAY THAT MITTERRAND'S STRATEGY IS PASSIVE. HE EXPECTS THE PS TO CONTINUE TO GROW, TO DO WELL IN THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS. BUT THERE IS A SENSE THAT THE CURRENT ENVIRONMENT HAS BOXED IN THE PS AND THAT UNLESS THE PCF SUDDENLY EXECUTES A TOTAL ABOUT-FACE, THE SOCIALISTS HAVE SOME YEARS TO WAIT BEFORE BEING ABLE TO MOUNT A CHALLENGE ONCE AGAIN FOR NATIONAL POWER. MITTERRAND SEEMS PREPARED TO ACCEPT THAT DELAY.

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HE BELIEVES IN THE HISTORIC PROGRESSION OF THE PARTY AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, IN ITS ROLE AS THE SOLE FORCE CAPABLE OF DEFUSING AN EVENTUAL "SOCIAL EXPLOSION". AS HE SAID, "FRANCE NEEDS A STRONG PS."

5. COMMUNISM AND THE PS: "WE (THE PS) DIDN'T CREATE THE COMMUNIST PARTY, WE INHERITED IT." THE COMMUNISTS ARE A 20 PERCENT FACT OF LIFE WHICH CANNOT BE IGNORED. MITTERRAND SAID HE ONCE ASKED HELMUT SCHMIDT WHAT HE WOULD DO IF THERE WERE A SEVEN MILLION COMMUNIST VOTE IN GERMANY. THE RESPONSE -- "PROBABLY ABOUT WHAT YOU HAVE DONE IN FRANCE." FOR THE FUTURE, MITTERRAND IS NOT OPTIMISTIC THAT THE DISSENT MOVEMENT WILL BE ABLE TO CHANGE THE PCF. HE LIKewise SEES LITTLE CHANCE THAT THE PS WILL BE ABLE TO QUICKLY ERODE COMMUNIST STRENGTH, WHICH IS BASED ON FOUR FACTORS:

- THE RELATIVELY LATE INDUSTRIALIZATION OF FRANCE WHICH ALLOWED THE PCF TO PROSPER FOR A LONGER TIME IN THE AGRARIAN ENVIRONMENT;
- THE LACK OF SOCIALIST COMPETITION UNTIL THE 1970'S;
- THE CATHOLIC HERITAGE WHICH HAS CREATED A FRENCH PREFERENCE FOR DOGMATIC SOLUTIONS;
- THE TENACITY OF THE FRENCH RIGHT TO ITS PROPERTY AND PRIVILEGES.

6. WHY THE LEFT FAILED: THE COMMUNISTS BEAR FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE LEFT'S LEGISLATIVE DEFEAT. IN MITTERRAND'S EYES, THE LEFT'S EDGE WAS SO GREAT THAT THE PCF HAD TO WORK EXTREMELY HARD TO SNATCH DEFEAT FROM THE JAWS OF VICTORY, EVEN TO THE EXTENT OF CONSCIOUSLY AROUSING ANTI-COMMUNIST SENTIMENTS IN THE CLOSING WEEKS OF THE CAMPAIGN. AS FOR SOCIALIST ECONOMIC

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CREDIBILITY, MITTERRAND ADMITS THAT PROMISES ON SOCIAL BENEFITS MAY HAVE GONE A BIT OVERBOARD, BUT MAINTAINS THAT THE CORE OF PS ECONOMIC THINKING IS VALID. "WHO REALLY CARES ABOUT A FEW MORE NATIONALIZATIONS (LESS THAN IN AUSTRIA), A BIT MORE EMPHASIS ON PLANNING?" IN DISCUSSING PS SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC POLICY, MITTERRAND FOCUSED ON FRANCE'S BACKWARDNESS AND THE NEED FOR SOCIAL CHANGE. HE SHOWED NO SENSITIVITY TO CONSTRAINTS ON FRANCE'S FREEDOM OF ECONOMIC ACTION THAT MIGHT BE

IMPOSED BY FRENCH MEMBERSHIP IN THE EC OR BY FRANCE'S
ROLE IN A LARGER INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC CONTEXT.

7. INSIDE THE PS: DISPLAYING HIS NORMAL DISLIKE OF
THE PRESS (WHICH SOMETIMES VERGES ON PARANOIA), MITTERRAND HAD NOTHING BUT CRITICISM FOR "SENSATIONALIZED" TREATMENT OF INTERNAL PS AFFAIRS (MITTERRAND ANNOUNCED JUNE 28 THAT THE PS WOULD PROBABLY CREATE ITS OWN DAILY NEWSPAPER IN THE NEAR FUTURE). WHILE NOT DENYING THAT HIS OWN SUPPORTERS WERE AT LEAST PARTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR BRINGING PARTY PROBLEMS INTO THE PUBLIC REALM, HE NONETHELESS CHARACTERIZED PRESS TREATMENT AS EXAGGERATED AND THE PROBLEMS THEMSELVES AS MINOR. AS HE HAS CONSISTENTLY DONE IN PUBLIC, MITTERRAND MADE IT CLEAR THAT HE PLANS TO REMAIN AT THE PARTY'S HELM FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE. "THE SUCCESSION IS NOT OPEN," HE STATED.

8. MITTERRAND HAD FEW KIND WORDS FOR THE UNITED STATES. HE EMPHASIZED THE "SUPERPOWER" ASPECT OF THE US ROLE IN THE WORLD, AND EVEN SAID THAT THE US HAD A DE-FACTO ALLIANCE WITH THE SOVIET UNION. WHEN WE POINTED OUT THAT THE ONLY IMPORTANT AREA WHERE OUR INTERESTS COINCIDED WAS A SEARCH FOR PEACE, MITTERRAND TOOK THIS STATEMENT AS A CONFIRMATION OF HIS EARLIER THESIS AND ADDED "BUT THAT AREA IS CRITICAL." MITTERRAND ALSO SHOWED HOSTILITY TO MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS, WHICH
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HE CLEARLY ASSOCIATES WITH THE US (A THEME, INCIDENTALLY, CHARACTERISTIC OF FRENCH GAULLISTS AS OF SOCIA-

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LISTS.

9. COMMENT: WHILE IT IS DIFFICULT TO ANALYZE A MAN AS COMPLEX AS FRANCOIS MITTERRAND, WE WERE MOST STRUCK BY HIS APPARENT ACCEPTANCE OF THE SOCIALISTS' CURRENT STRATEGIC DILEMMA. HE DID NOT ARGUE THAT SOCIALISM IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER OR EVEN SPECULATE ON THE ELECTORAL TACTICS BY WHICH THE PS MIGHT SOME DAY COME TO POWER. GRANTED THAT A PS/PCF ALLIANCE IS STILL THE ONLY FEASIBLE ROUTE INTO GOVERNMENT, MITTERRAND SHOWED LITTLE INTEREST IN EVEN EXPLORING THE ELECTORAL EQUATION. HE NOW PLACES PRIMARY EMPHASIS ON STRICTLY AUTONOMOUS SOCIALIST ACTION WHICH WILL SOME DAY RESULT IN A PS SO PREDOMINANT
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THAT OTHER "POPULAR FORCES" (READ PCF) WILL HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO FOLLOW. BURNED BADLY IN 1978 BY HIS COMMUNIST "PARTNERS," MITTERRAND IS NOW WARY OF SUCH TACTICAL ALLIANCES. BUT HE HAS IN NO WAY ABANDONED THE FUNDAMENTAL SOCIALIST STRATEGY OF A LEFT PARTY, FOUNDED ON THE WORKING CLASS AND A SIGNIFICANT BREAK WITH THE EXISTING CAPITALIST STATE. THAT STRATEGY, IN HIS VIEW, CANNOT WORK IN FRANCE WITHOUT THE COMMUNISTS. THE PCF MAY NOT BE RELIABLE, BUT FOR MITTERRAND IT'S STILL ULTIMATELY THE ONLY POSSIBLE PARTNER.
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